

Don't Let Tony Fix Your Jet Ski Without a Manual

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The term “maintenance safety” is normally connected with our work on naval aircraft. But it’s just as important at home, as I learned during a recent weekend.

It started out like most of my weekends—boring! Little did I know that I was in for the lesson of a lifetime. Early Saturday morning, my next-door neighbor, Tony, knocked on my door and asked if I was up for a few hours of fun in the sun. There was a catch, though. Tony had just bought a used jet ski and needed my help with some minor repairs.

The jet ski appeared to be in great shape, but it needed a new throttle cable and some minor fiberglass touch ups. I had done some fiberglass repairs in the past and knew this job would be simple. While I worked on the fiberglass, Tony began replacing the throttle cable. Our plan was to complete the repairs on Saturday and go to a harbor Sunday morning for some serious fun.

In about two hours, I had the fiberglass repaired. I needed only to do some final sanding and add a few coats of paint. Tony, on the other hand, was having difficulties. The throttle cable was harder to replace than he had anticipated, and he did not have the owner’s manual. He had all sorts of wiring harnesses disconnected, and it looked like electrical spaghetti on the floor. I told Tony that maybe he should go to a dealer to buy an owner’s manual, but he said no, that he would “figure it out.” I left it at that, and that was my mistake.

Later that night, I went back to Tony’s house to check on the fiberglass repair and finish the final sanding and painting. To my surprise, Tony had finished replacing the throttle cable, and everything was back together. We were in business. After a few minutes of sanding and a final wipe-down, I applied the first coat of paint. After leaving it under a heat lamp for a couple of hours, I applied the final

coat. Everything was finished, and it took only one day. Tomorrow was going to be a blast!

Sunday morning finally arrived. By the time I had dressed and eaten breakfast, Tony had the truck loaded, and we were ready to go. The trip to the harbor was short, and in a matter of minutes, the jet ski was in the water and ready for some speed trials.

Tony started up the jet ski, and it purred like a kitten. My adrenaline was really pumping; this looked like it was going to be a blast. Tony took the jet ski out and was whizzing around in the water, having a grand old time. It didn’t take long, however, for things to take a turn for the worse.

As Tony was having the time of his life, the repaired throttle stuck wide open. Traveling at top speed, Tony hit the wake of a boat, which threw him off the jet ski. Under normal circumstances, as soon as you let go of the throttle, a jet ski idles. But this one didn’t. It kept going until it crashed into the side of a really nice cabin cruiser. *[Note: It is a law in every state that you must have a lanyard connecting you to a kill switch on your jet ski, so if you fall off, the jet ski will stop. Obviously, Tony didn’t have one.—Ed.]*

No one got hurt, and the damage was minimal. However, we had some explaining to do the to owner of the boat. This little episode taught Tony and me that you can’t assume you know how something is *supposed* to be done.

Publications and manuals are important, and we need them to do a job correctly and thoroughly. There is not a single aircraft mechanic or technician who would do a maintenance job without first consulting the applicable publications or manuals. Tony and I should have applied that same logic to this job. Tony thought it was a simple job and so did I. But when he ran into problems, I should have pressed him into buying the owner’s manual. Taking shortcuts puts property and lives at risk. 